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# Topic A

## The Geneva Outcome



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## 'Linkage' Is Back

A French linguist who interpreted for Kennedy and de Gaulle and a Russian linguist who translated for Kennedy and Khrushchev both told me the same thing: by mutual consent with their opposite numbers, they tore up their notes. The nuances of alien tongues, they said, are too tricky to constitute an objective record of exactly what the great men are trying to convey.

However this was handled at Geneva, the problem remains: one man's word against another's, when they don't speak the same language, is not much help if there are no official witnesses and you are trying to score the encounter on points.

None of the conventional scorecards, for that matter, are of much help. Mikhail Gorbachev's main goal was to knock out Ronald Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, some say; so he "lost." But if his more realistic aim was to play to European opinion by setting up Reagan's recalcitrance as the stumbling block to arms control, maybe he will "win" in the end. Similarly, Reagan said he wanted "regional conflicts" to be a central issue at Geneva. But, with the exception of Afghanistan, Gorbachev apparently brushed the issue away. So Reagan lost?

One the contrary, by stonewalling on Star Wars while pushing "regional conflicts" and human rights, Reagan managed something, for better or worse, that will be of far more lasting significance than any of the transitory "wins" or "losses." On the anvil of summitry, he has hammered out as a working proposi-

tion for the first time in his presidency what Henry Kissinger would call a "conceptual framework" for the conduct of U.S. relations with the Soviet Union.

The head-knocking at Geneva has given Kissinger's and Richard Nixon's much-maligned and ultimately discarded concept of "linkage" a new lease on life.

What Reagan was telling Gorbachev, in effect, was that he wasn't going to set arms control or SDI aside for special treatment; that he intended to treat U.S.-Soviet relations in their totality; that he wished to start a process that takes into account all the points of conflict.

And that is exactly what Nixon and Kissinger were telling a balky U.S. bureaucracy in early 1969. At his first press briefing, Kissinger introduced the word "linkage" into diplomatic jargon: speaking of "the linkage between the political and the strategic environment," he said Nixon "would like to deal with the problem of peace on the entire front in which peace is challenged and not only on the military one."

This was a sharp shift. Nixon noted in a private letter to his secretaries of state and defense and the CIA director: "The previous administration had tried to 'insulate' particular targets of diplomatic opportunity 'as much as possible from the ups and downs of conflicts elsewhere.'"

Now hear Secretary of State George

Shultz in a speech last month that looks in hindsight more than ever like the blueprint for the administration's summit strategy. "Arms control is not just a technical exercise," Shultz said. "It has to be embedded in a policy and in an environment that reduce our real dangers and make the world safer. . . . Weapons are the symptoms of this [political] struggle, not its cause." Now hear a latter-day Nixon, in this fall's Foreign Affairs magazine: "It is not the existence of arms, but political differences that lead to their use, which leads to war."

The two men are coming down together on one side of a longstanding issue. If Nixon and Kissinger reversed Democratic policy, Jimmy Carter and his secretary of state, Cyrus Vance, turned the policy back again. In their first extended conversation, Vance

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recalls in his memoirs, "Carter made clear that one of his highest priorities would be to conclude a new SALT agreement, and without linking it to other aspects of U.S.-Soviet relations."

The clear message from Geneva, then, is that "linkage" by whatever name is back in style, not just as something you might read into assorted policy pronouncements, but as a strategy put to hard practice by the president face-to-face with his Soviet counterpart. And the real question from Geneva is not so much who won or lost but whether this strategy will work any better the second time around.

Part of the answer is lost in uncertainties about how the Soviets will respond. Another part is lost in differences of opinion over how well it worked the first time. Kissinger argues that it worked usefully to produce détente—and that détente worked until Nixon was in no condition to make anything work.

But Kissinger also concedes that "linkage . . . is not a natural concept for Americans," that political discontinuity, bureaucratic fragmentation and American pragmatism rob us of "a sense of time or context or the seamless web of reality." If that is indeed our natural state, Ronald Reagan has his work cut out for him. More so than in any administration in recent memory, seamlessness has not been a distinguishing feature of his administration's conduct of foreign policy.